

# A Tale of Two Republics:

## A comparative study into the presence of far-right populism in Ireland and France

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### Why has Ireland not seen the same rise in far-right populism as other European nations such as France?

**Abstract**

Over the past decade, Europe has seen a significant rise in far-right political parties and movements – Ireland has been almost entirely immune from this, with the few existing far-right parties sitting on the furthest fringes of Irish politics far from legislative or rhetorical influence. This dissertation will seek to examine the reasons as to why this is the case, using a comparative case study of Ireland and France. In France, the far-right populist party *Front National* has seen a far greater level of relative success than any attempts at a far-right movement in Ireland. This dissertation will examine the economic and material conditions of Ireland and France and the effects of the financial crisis and the relative responses of their respective governments and the effect this has had on the conditions present for far-right populism to take hold. This dissertation will also assess how the political landscape in Ireland has given far-right populism little to no foothold in Ireland, assessing the voter capture of the current parties, including those deemed on the left that have been deemed to be populist such as Sinn Féin. Lastly, this dissertation will examine the populist elements present in the politics of each country and how the discourse used has influenced the potential for the development of far-right populists. Through this, this study hopes to further the understanding of both the populist phenomenon and the nature of Irish and French politics in relation to this.

**What is Populism?**

Populism is a highly contested concept with much disagreement over its exact nature – for the purposes of this study, populism was conceptualised as a political style with heavy ideological influences, wherein the ideological and discursive elements are mutually reliant on each other. In the case of far-right populism, in the European context, being characterised by nativist, authoritarian and often Eurosceptical ideological influences (Mudde, 2007:22).

**The Role of the Rise of Sinn Féin**

- Context of the Troubles: Official Ireland blamed the death toll of the conflict on Sinn Féin leaving the party with ~2% vote share in the Republic of Ireland (Allen & O’Boyle, 2013:144).
- Establishment of the equality agenda and socialist rhetoric allowed them to gain traction electorally. This socialist rhetoric is fairly cynical as the party’s policy position does not fit their platform and there has been consistent indication that socialism is secondary to the Irish unification agenda.
- The use of populist discourse, substituting anti-immigrant rhetoric for a largely anti-English discursive style
- Sinn Féin’s voting demographic is typical of European far-right parties such as Front National.

**The role of the financial crisis**

- The experience of Ireland much closer to Southern European countries such as Portugal, Spain and Italy.
- Unemployment and economic privation more severe in southern European countries than in northern European countries such as France, Germany or the UK.
- France, like other northern European countries has seen a shift right due to a sense of *nostalgia* for a romanticised and constructed version of past society
- Ireland doesn’t have the same romantic conception of its own past given the experience of British imperial rule

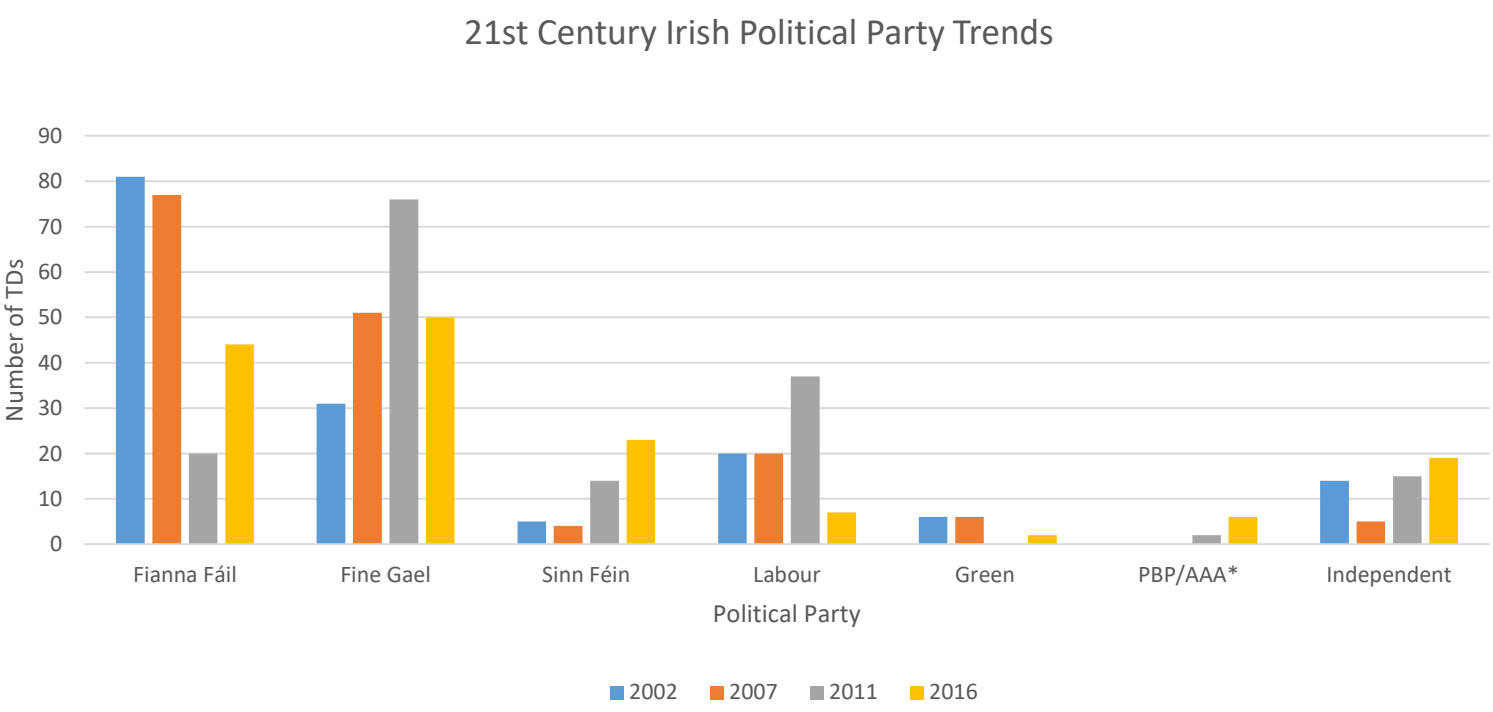
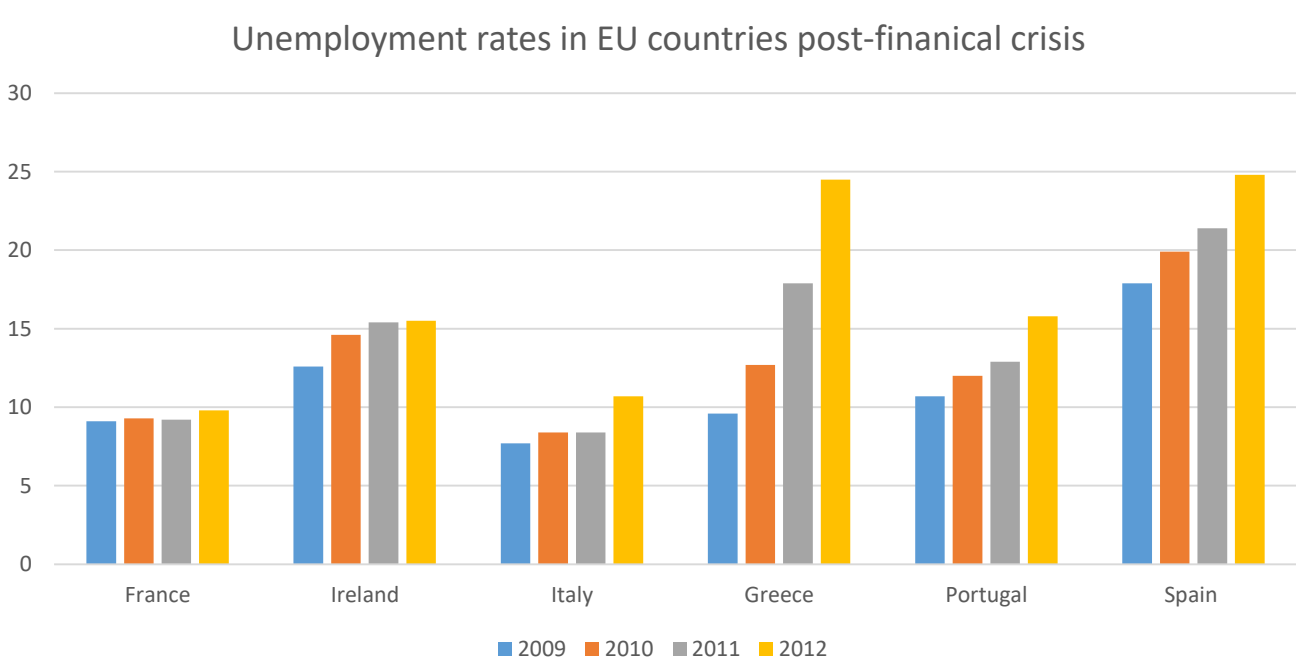


Figure 1 – created by author. Data from Irish government, available at [www.Oireachtas.ie](http://www.Oireachtas.ie)



Created by author. Data from Eurostat, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tipslm80&plugin=1>

**Conclusions**

- France’s far-right populist party has shifted towards the political mainstream through legitimization by mainstream politicians and through their process of *dédiabolisation*.
- Ireland’s populism is contained within the mainstream, largely with *Sinn Féin* acting as a left-populist party who occupy the electoral demographic which most European far-right parties occupy. *Sinn Féin* however replace xenophobic discourse with historical republican anti-British discourse.
- Irish party attachment being historically so high has meant that it is only in the post-crisis period that party attachment has been reduced. This has meant that perhaps Ireland has not yet had time to develop a far-right party given historically party attachment was based more on lineage than on social bases.